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CDC Health Advisory

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CDC Alert on Ricin

The United States Postal Service, in conjunction with federal and state law enforcement and public health officials, identified an unmarked and sealed envelope containing a threatening note and a sealed container believed to contain a toxic substance at a small postal handling facility in Greenville, South Carolina. The Department of Health and Human Services' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) confirmed that the substance was the toxin Ricin.

The facility was closed and CDC conducted environmental testing. The results of the environmental testing were negative for the presence of Ricin. There are no indications of employee exposure or of adverse health effects as a result of this incident. A criminal investigation by the FBI and US Postal Inspection Service is currently underway.

Ricin is a potent biologic toxin that is derived from castor beans. Inhalation of Ricin or of abrin, which is a closely related toxin, typically leads to cough and respiratory distress followed by pulmonary edema, respiratory failure, and multisystem organ failure. Weakness and influenza-like symptoms of fever, myalgia, and arthralgia may also be reported.

For an overview of Ricin, including signs, symptoms, and treatment, please visit <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/ricin/index.asp>.

Anyone needing more information on Ricin poisoning should contact the Palmetto Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222.

Clinicians who suspect cases of Ricin poisoning are requested to immediately report such cases to their state or local health departments.

CDC requests that reports of suspected cases from state and local health departments be reported to the CDC Emergency Operations Center, telephone 770-488-7100.

Categories of Health Alert messages:

Health Alert: conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

Health Advisory: provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

Health Update: provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.